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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [SOCIETY](#)

SUBJECT: IDF CHIEF OF STAFF SAYS DISENGAGEMENT HAS NOT HARMED THE IDF, BUT RAISED PROBLEMS OF STATE VS. RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

(U) Classified by Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4. (B) and (D).

1. (S) SUMMARY. In an August 3 meeting with Deputy National Security Adviser Abrams, the Ambassador and Gen. Ward, the IDF Chief of the General Staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, said that disengagement has not harmed the IDF as an institution. It has, however, created problems, particularly in the area of defining personal responsibilities to religion and to the state, which will take time to heal. The PA is saying all of the right things, according to Halutz, but there remains a gap between words and actions on the ground. Halutz explained that he will recommend a policy of no tolerance in response to attacks emanating out of Gaza following disengagement. The PA, he stressed, must understand that disengagement is not a one-time test and that Israel will expect the PA to exert continuous action against terrorism. Mahmud Abbas, he stated, risks his regime by not confronting Hamas, which seeks to replace the PA as the authority in Gaza. Concerning Iran, Halutz stated that there is no disagreement between the USG and Israel that Tehran seeks a nuclear weapon capability; any disagreement is over how much time before it happens. END SUMMARY.

Disengagement is Underway

2. (S) Disengagement started, for all intents and purposes, in mid-July, when the IDF closed the Gaza Strip to Israeli visitors, Lt Gen Danny Halutz, Chief of the General Staff, stated. It is a confusing situation, he commented, for the soldiers and the Israeli families who live in the Gaza settlements. In the past, the IDF assisted and protected the settlers. While the IDF continues that same mission today, soldiers are now restricting settlers, travel and preventing other Israelis from visiting them in their homes. Most Gaza residents are "digesting" the new situation, he stated, and realize that disengagement is going to happen. Nonetheless, protests against the disengagement will likely continue up to and during the operation. The situation is difficult, more so since virtually everyone in Israel either has relatives or friends in Gaza or knows of people living there.

Refusal

3. (S) The IDF, Halutz stated, has not been harmed by the disengagement as an institution. However, there are some problems that have surfaced that will take some time to heal. Thus far, there have been some 50 refusers, mostly religious, he stated, suggesting that this might only be the tip of the iceberg. The issue of personal responsibility to religion and to the state, he opined, is the only major issue dividing the people. As a result, the IDF will have to deal with this issue after the disengagement. Halutz stated that refusal to participate in the evacuation has mostly been an individual issue, with only one instance of a group of nine members from the same unit refusing orders. There have been few officers, he stated, who have refused. This is a red line for the IDF, he stated, which treats refusal among the officer corps much more seriously, as officers have volunteered to serve the state and institute its decisions.

PA Performance

4. (S) The situation is difficult for the Palestinians as well, Halutz continued. Hamas will likely hold to the "quiet", but a few gangs that continue to plan and carry out attacks will not. If they hurt civilians then it will add another burden, he commented. The IDF is making preparations, he said, and has deployed a large force to keep terror from interfering with disengagement. If terror increases prior to 15 August, he said, the IDF will take steps to prevent attacks against the disengagement, particularly during the evacuation of civilians. Responding to a question concerning PA security performance, Halutz stated that the PA was saying the right things, but noted the gap between PA words and actions. Halutz stated that he did not accept the excuse of weakness, adding that PA performance is more an issue of will than capability.

Day After

15. (S) Halutz predicted the outbreak of a new round of violence if the PA fails to decide to control the security situation and to return to negotiations following disengagement. Should there be a renewal of attacks from post-disengagement Gaza, Halutz stated that he would recommend that the government adopt a policy of zero tolerance, treating such attacks as a conflict between two countries. The IDF, he said, will have increased freedom of action following disengagement, as there will no longer be Israeli citizens in Gaza. The IDF, he continued, has a big basket of toys, such as missiles that are much more accurate than Palestinian Qassam rockets. Should there be a new cycle of violence, Halutz opined that it would be much like it is today, with terror attacks shifting from Gaza to the West Bank. More Israeli cities, however, will be vulnerable to rocket attacks, he stated. Currently, the IDF considers the attempt to transfer rocket technology and material into the West Bank as a "ticking bomb." Underscoring his point, he stated that the IDF recently killed three Palestinians and captured others who were involved in efforts to transfer rockets and rocket-manufacturing "know-how" to the West Bank.

16. (S) The PA must understand, Halutz explained, that disengagement is not a one-time test. The PA, he stated, must ask itself, "What is the purpose of armed groups in Gaza after disengagement?" The PA will have to stop terror. Abbas' strategy of not confronting Hamas, he stated, is a risk to his regime, as the group is attempting to replace the PA as the authority in Gaza. Halutz characterized the "arrest" of Fatah terrorist Hassan Madhun as fictitious. Madhun, who agreed to a PA request to stay in "jail" for 48 hours, left after 24, he stated. Moreover, he continued plans to carry out attacks against the passages in the Gaza Strip, which will clearly impact the PA itself. Lu'ay Saadi, the leader of a PIJ cell responsible for a number of recent terror attacks, he stated, remains at large. The IDF missed capturing one of the cell members recently, with the terrorist escaping to a PA security force headquarters, he stated. "There is nothing new," Halutz stated. "It's the same old stories."

Iran

17. (S) Responding to a question, Halutz stated that Iran is on track to acquire nuclear weapons capability. The USG and Israel agree that this is the case, disagreeing only on how long it will take. Halutz opined that if worse comes to worst, Iran would have a bomb in three years.

18. (U) Mr. Abrams cleared this message.

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